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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PARLIAMENTARY AND NON-PARLIAMENTARY
OPPOSITIONS CONTINUE TO DIVERGE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary/Comment: The comments of both Parliamentary and non-Parliamentary opposition leaders indicate that their interests and visions for the near and longer term future continue to diverge. Cooperation between the Parliamentary and non-Parliamentary opposition camps is limited at best. The non-parliamentary opposition continues to accuse its parliamentary counterparts of being collaborators with the Government and has focused on agitating for President Saakashvili's resignation and the holding of new elections. The Parliamentary opposition is increasingly seized with staking out positions on substantive issues and promoting new initiatives within the Parliament. As a result, they are growing ever more critical and increasingly skeptical of the motives of their counterparts outside of Parliament. The Christian Democrats (CDM), the largest opposition party in parliament, have little to gain from new elections and have told us that they need a few years without elections to build a nationwide party that is capable of winning a parliamentary majority. With the remaining independent members of the parliamentary opposition threatened with the possibility of losing their mandates in new mandates, the whole of the Parliamentary opposition seems very content with the status quo. While the Parliamentary opposition has contingency plans for the possibility of new elections, we expect that they will continue to argue against new elections as unnecessary and unwise. Independent polls continue to show that the public is also opposed to early elections, meaning that the non-parliamentary opposition's calls for elections are expected to fall on deaf ears, barring major economic or political changes. End Summary/Comment.

Parliamentary Opposition Works the System

12. (C) CDM leaders Giorgi Targamadze and George Rukhadze told poloff in no uncertain terms that they were opposed to new elections. Targamadze said the non-Parliamentary opposition is making irresponsible demands and there is no legal basis for new elections. He criticized the non-Parliamentary, "Rustaveli elite", for worrying more about their personal political fortunes than what is good for the country. He said that the call for new elections is an attempt to regain some relevance and ultimately only benefits the Russians. Targamadze repeatedly made the point to Poloff that he did not want to help push any Russian agenda in Georgia. According to Targamadze, the CDM would marginally gain from new elections numbers-wise so he did not fear new elections, but he opposed them on principle. Targamadze, however, admitted to Poloff that the CDM also benefited from being the major opposition party in the Parliament, and that new elections that brought additional opposition voices into Parliament could dilute CDM's public platform.

13. (C) One man party Jondi Baghaturia (Georgian Troupe) clearly relishes his position as an MP and is dead set against elections. Unlikely to be re-elected to any new Parliament, Baghaturia, like Targamadze, has a vested interest in "principled" opposition to new elections. At any rate, Baghaturia says the demands for new elections are not

serious and are not supported by the public. Baghaturia, a former member of the United Opposition, simply says, "we lost and we'd lose again." Baghaturia likewise calls new election talk to be "wishful thinking" and says non-Parliamentary opposition members simply want MP positions now that they have found life on the outside unattractive. Both Baghaturia and Targamadze think that the likelihood of Saakashvili calling for new elections is zero, unless there was pressure from the U.S., and even then only Parliamentary elections would be called. Both opined that the National Movement (UNM) would stand to lose some seats but would remain the majority even with a "reformed" election code.

Non-Parliamentary Opposition Wants New Elections

14. (C) Not surprisingly, Kakha Kukava (Conservatives) viewed new elections a bit differently. Kukava argued to Poloff that there would be no resolution of the political crisis until Saakashvili left office. Kukava said that the non-Parliamentary opposition still intends to stage protests to bring about new elections, but has not formalized its plans. In fact, Kukava admitted that he was unsure if a planned late January protest would take place and said a smaller indoor rally is being considered. Kukava further acknowledged that he sees any consolidation of non-Parliamentary opposition in the near term as very unlikely. He noted that likely participants in any future protests would be the former members of the United Opposition, although without the support of New Rights, Georgian Troupe, and We Ourselves (Paata Davitaia). The remaining group constitutes the most radical elements of the non-Parliamentary opposition. Labor and perhaps another

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party or two might participate in protests, but would do so only as a general matter of support for anti-Saakashvili forces, and would not officially join the ever dwindling United Opposition ranks. Kukava is aware of various polls showing public opinion is against new elections and protests.

Regardless, he vows to move forward saying that polling always shows the public against these things, but that protests triggered elections before and would do so again. Surprisingly, Kukava admitted to poloff that he regretted not taking his mandate -- "not 100% but maybe 50% of me thinks I should have taken it."

15. (C) Industrialist leader, Zurab Tkemaladze whose party ran in a small bloc and garnered less than 1% support in the 2008 Parliamentary elections, said there is no legal or constitutional norm to hold new elections. Tkemaladze also stated that Saakashvili would not call for new elections, but would not be afraid to do so if necessary. Tkemaladze is also of the opinion that UNM would win handily saying there might be a different dynamic in Parliament, but Saakashvili is safe. A generation or so older than most in the GOG or among opposition leaders, Tkemaladze lamented the lack of statesmen among the current crop of politicians. Tkemaladze see public protests as unwise, unwanted, and counterproductive. A former MP, Tkemaladze is dead set against new elections, saying the country has had too many revolutions and none have had positive results. For once, he said, Georgia needs to have a constitutional change of power, his personal dissatisfaction with Saakashvili notwithstanding.

All Agree that Funding is Key

16. (C) Targamadze, Baghaturia, Kukava, and Tkemaladze all stated that the ability to raise funds independently is a critical to the success of their political aspirations and operations. Targamadze is proposing legislation to try to limit the GOG's ability to "regulate" business and thereby attract financial support. All agreed that as a practical matter, obtaining private funding for political parties is impossible. Targamadze, Baghaturia, and Tkemaladze alleged that there are many prominent businessmen who would gladly

fund opposition candidates, but they fear GOG reprisals. Until those in the opposition can effectively fund-raise, the ability to spread their message will be limited. All were critical of Saakashvili, but to varying degrees. Kukava said that Saakashvili is totally and completely discredited. Targamadze, Baghaturia, and Tkemaladze were less strident in their views. All gave Saakashvili some credit for economic reforms and limited democratic progress. They believed that they needed to push Saakashvili toward more democratic reforms and specifically requested that the USG pass along a similar message. Targamadze said "the more voices telling Saakashvili the same thing the better." He and Tkemaladze both told PolOff that "he listens to you (US)".

Both Parts of the Opposition Jockey for Position

17. (C) Kukava said he is open to working with the CDM because it actually is an opposition party, but not Davitaia or Baghaturia whom he regards as tools of the United National Movement (UNM). (Embassy Comment: This represents a minor shift for Kukava who had viewed all the Parliamentary opposition as a wholly owned subsidy of the UNM. A willingness to work with CDM shows that they are gaining in stature even among opposition rivals. End Comment.) In general, Kukava and his allies have no plan other than staging new protests. Eka Beselia (United Georgia - Qstaging new protests. Eka Beselia (United Georgia - Okruashvili's Party), said that the non-Parliamentary opposition needs to and will consolidate, but she could not put forth any realistic scenarios in which this would occur. Beselia relayed to PolOff a more nuanced take on public opinion polls showing little public desire for elections. According to Beselia, the numbers supporting new elections are low because a majority of Georgian just assume Saakashvili will rig the elections. Absent Saakashvili, there is widespread public support for elections. Nevertheless, Beselia said that the only option is to continue to protest. What is clear is that the non-Parliamentary opposition has not put much thought into how to move forward if elections do not occur, likely meaning its ad-hoc approach to politics will continue.

18. (C) Giorgi Targamadze predicted problems for the non-Parliamentary opposition if no elections are held. Specifically, he said that the New Rights-Republican party will not survive. Although Gamkrelidze and Usupashvili are personal friends, the rank and file of their parties despise each other. Without a common goal of winning an upcoming election, Targamadze said that the alliance is sure to collapse. Targamadze and Tkemaladze both noted that there is not one personality who can unite the non-Parliamentary opposition. Targamadze said that other than Labor, no

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non-Parliamentary opposition party offers a clear policy alternative to UNM. None of the current non-Parliamentary nor Parliamentary leaders viewed Irakli Alasania as a game changer. In fact, Kukava dismissed him out of hand saying every 6 months a new exciting leader enters, makes a quick splash then fails to achieve widespread support. Targamadze, Tkemaladze, Baghaturia, and Beselia were more charitable. All called him an intelligent and talented individual, but questioned his abilities as a politician. None were willing to foreclose the possibility of Alasania playing a role, but suggested his time as an effective political leader is down the road. At a minimum, Alasania faces an uphill climb to unite a substantial portion of the non-Parliamentary opposition behind him -- assuming that even is his goal. In all, Targamadze seems to relish the opportunity a dwindling non-Parliamentary opposition presents. If and when the non-Parliamentary opposition starts to further splinter, Targamadze and the CDM will be waiting to welcome them and their supporters with open arms.

TEFFT